

WHEN JOHN BULL SAYS RIGHT-OF-SEARCH HE MEANS IT



This is a photograph of a visit-and-search party from a British man of war engaged in finding out just what cargo the merchantman carries, whether any part of the cargo is legitimate contraband of war and whether or not the ship carries any guns that make her in effect a warship and liable to be treated as such. Note the clean-cut profiles of the British officer and his "staff."

Letter of a British Officer in Mesopotamia to His Wife

Dear Marigold:

If I could send you a snap-shot of myself as I write this you would smile. I am sitting inside a fly-trap that to an onlooker might seem very much like the bridal veil you wore when we were married—seems like a lifetime ago. I am completely swathed in this white net which contains also my paper, ink and pen. But if I should wait till I can find a place or a time when there are no flies you would be a long while hearing from me; and it takes long enough now to get letters to and from this hot country they call Mesopotamia.

As you note, I am not far from the land in which Omar Khayyam wrote his Rubaiyat. Well, I am in no humour to write any such philosophy, and if old Omar had been a soldier in modern times I'm afraid he would not have been so quick with his pen. One verse fits however:

"A book of verses underneath the bough, . . . A jug of wine, a loaf of bread and thou—

Beside me, singing in the wilderness, Ah, wilderness were paradise enow." But I haven't his verses, and I don't imagine that, even if I had, this place would be much of a paradise. It's a very picturesque country, and in that respect I don't wonder that old Omar could draw such pleasing pictures of it. But it's too infernally hot to be poetic. I don't believe this country would ever make a Parsee of me. Worshipping the sun is all very well in England



where sometimes the sun's very scarce. Here we get too much of it. I'm baking, blistering, brewing in this magnificent heat. I could do with less of it. We English are strange people. We seem to like almost any country that war or adventure drives us into. But I should like this country better if it were closer to the real centre of war. It makes one impatient sometimes to think that you know a hundred times more about what the war is really doing than I do. We never get news of the west front here till it's replaced in home newspapers with some new news. I wonder if the big offensive has really begun out there in France and Flanders. We shall probably get news soon.

So, send me all you can. Have patience with our slowness out here among the Turks. It's all part of the big work. And don't be impatient about the long time it takes a letter to reach you. Neither if the envelope contains a few flies.

There is no time for poetry in this country now. I fancy the chief poets are now among the dirty refugees we've passed on the way here. War and poetry don't go hand in hand, but they follow one another, and I suppose when the war is over and peace settles down everywhere the poets will come out from their holes again like toads after a rain, and tune up. They'll write odes to shell-holes and sonnets to abandoned guns. When they've done all that they'll turn as usual to stars and flowers and women. Well—in the last respect, dear wife, even soldiers are one with the poets yet. They will be the ones, when the war is over, to come home and read the doggerel the poets turn out. That is how the world seems to run—alternate war and peace,—strife and poetry.

Write the news. We are hungry for it.

Yours—